

Four grievances filed in recent weeks against Gloucester police Chief John Beaudette by Officer Stephen Lamberis make it clear that a recent \$25,000 settlement between the patrolman and the city that brought him back to work after 17 months on administrative leave didn't settle anything.

This is obviously a problem that is not going away.

But those grievances also open a window to the police union contract that should concern everyone from elected leaders to the average taxpayer. If it were not for contract provisions that are both unreasonable and unaffordable, Lamberis would have had no grounds for these grievances. It should be the priority of Mayor John Bell to get rid of them in the next round of negotiations.

The Lamberis case has cost the city far more than \$25,000, of course. The city paid him about \$111,000 in salary and benefits during the time he was on leave. The only stated reason for that lengthy leave, according to Bell and others, was that Lamberis had "a past record of poor judgment."

But Lamberis now wants much more than the \$25,000. Specifically:

- * He wants overtime pay for attending an emergency medicine training class he attended in November while on leave. He alleges that the contract dictates he receive that pay.
- * He says that Lt. Michael O'Hanley kept him assigned to the station during a shift Jan. 27 in violation of contract provisions that say he should have been made the street supervisor, which would have given him higher pay for the shift.
- * He complains that Chief Beaudette changed his schedule in violation of the contract.
- * He alleges that the city assigned his unused sick, vacation and personal days to various days when he was on leave in 2005. He claims he is owed 80 vacation days, 51 sick days and eight personal days. Apparently, he contends he never would have taken a vacation, sick or personal day in all of 2005 had he been working.

Most reasonable people would say such claims are ridiculous. How can somebody claim overtime pay if they're not working a single regular hour? Why can't the chief assign schedules to subordinates? Why even have a chief if he can't make managerial decisions? How can somebody claim "unused" sick days if he wasn't working in the first place?

Beaudette says all four grievances have no merit. He says those seeking money for overtime, vacation, sick and personal time were voided by the agreement that brought Lamberis back to work. He says the other two are not grievable because they are management prerogatives.

Taxpayers can only hope he is right. But the chief is acknowledging that on the claims for more pay, Lamberis would have had a case based on the contract language had it not been for the settlement.

Ridiculous or not, the city has to take such claims seriously because they are based on the union interpretation of contract provisions.

If anything good comes from the Lamberis case, it may be that the fine print of the police contract is being exposed to those who get stuck with the bills generated by such suffocating work rules. In a city struggling to remain financially solvent, it is long past time to eliminate such lavish gravy.